

We'll go ahead with Manpads buy: Najib

SUN 21 OCT 2003

SHAH ALAM: Malaysia will go ahead with its programme to acquire the Man-Portable Air Defence System (Manpads) to meet its defence requirements despite the US's plans to ban such weaponry in this region.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said yesterday security will be tightened to prevent such assets from falling into the wrong hands.

Malaysia, being a sovereign nation, considers buying defence assets based on its needs, he said.

"There's no reason for Malaysia to stop or cancel the purchase of defence apparatus like this which we have in

our hands," *Bernama* reported him as saying after chairing the Defence Industry Council meeting here.

The US wants to ban Manpads in this region for fear they might fall into the hands of terrorists.

It feels the Manpads, which can be easily handled by one person, can pose a threat to the safety of military and civil aircraft.

However, agency reports say Malaysia managed to influence the 15th Apec Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok not to include in its statement any action plan to tackle the Manpads issue.

Quoting Apec diplomats, *AFP* said Prime Minister

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad felt the issue was largely a security problem that should be addressed in detail by other forums and not within Apec.

Apec officials said the draft of a joint statement, which initially contained a portion calling for a commitment by Apec leaders to "impose strict control of these weapons and their essential components in order to protect international aviation", could be reviewed.

"Initially we thought it is going to be adopted without any problems. Now, there could a debate on this but it could still be adopted," said an official.